

260

Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?

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INTRODUCTION BY
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Dr. Ironside writes:

"I consider that Dr. Thiessen has done a real service for those who are bewildered by conflicting views, by presenting the matter so plainly and so clearly in this booklet, and I feel certain a careful reading of it will be used of God to deliver many from the confusing idea of the Post-Tribulation Rapture."

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INTRODUCTION

IT is passing strange to me how any Bible instructed Christian can think for a moment of the Church of God, the Body of Christ, going, either in whole or in part, through that solemn period of judgment which is so definitely declared in the Word of God to be a time of wrath. In the light of the fact that "God hath not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him" (I Thess. 5: 9, 10), it is to my mind unthinkable that the Church should pass through this hour of trial, which is distinctively the time of Jacob's trouble and is to try all them that dwell upon the earth. Through infinite grace, we who belong to the Body of Christ are not earth-dwellers, but our citizenship is in heaven. Consequently, we have no part in the wrath that is to be poured out upon apostate Christendom and Judaism.

That there will be saints of God on the earth in those days is clear from Scripture, but they will be called out of the existing confusion at that time and saved for the earth when it shall be blessed under Messiah's beneficent reign, or, on the other hand, those who will be martyred under the beast will have their part in the heavenly side of the Kingdom. But the Bride of the Lamb will have been taken home ere this and will be with her Lord in the glory, to appear with Him at the end of the Great Tribulation, when He descends to set up His Kingdom. Where there is a clear understanding

Introduction

of the difference between the Church and the Kingdom, there will be no confusion in regard to Tribulation saints. It is failure to recognize this that results in an attempt to apply Scriptures to the Church which refer to another group altogether.

I consider that Dr. Thiessen has done a real service for those who are bewildered by conflicting views, by presenting the matter so plainly and so clearly in this booklet, and I feel certain a careful reading of it will be used of God to deliver many from the confusing idea of the Post-Tribulation Rapture.

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FOREWORD

THIS booklet is an expansion of an address delivered by the writer at several Bible Conferences, such as Erieside Bible Conference, Willoughby, Ohio, and the Pacific Palisades Bible Conference, Los Angeles, California, and in various churches. The appreciation with which the oral message was received has led him to think that possibly the larger public might also appreciate it. Hence its appearance in this form.

The author realizes that there are a number of pamphlets in print on this subject; but he feels that there is still something to be said on it. This he believes to be all the more evident today since there have recently appeared several articles and books that take the opposite view from that set forth in this study. In presenting his own view the writer has sought to bear in mind Paul's admonition that we endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 3, 13).

It should be added that during the year 1935 this material appeared as a series of three articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, and that it is here reproduced, somewhat abridged and revised, with the kind permission of the publishers of that magazine.

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WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION ?

THE revival of interest in the study of prophecy during the last half century or more has restored to the Church the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ; but it has brought with it also many different interpretations as to the details connected with that event. For the most part the Church has returned to the premillennial view of Christ's return, but that is not quite uniformly the case. Among premillennialists there is a difference of opinion as to the time of our Lord's return in relation to the Tribulation. Although the majority of these would probably hold that the Church will be caught up before the Tribulation, there is just now a revival of the teaching that it will pass through the Tribulation. Some take an intermediate position and teach that the Church will pass through the first half of the Tribulation. In addition to this there are some who believe in a "partial" rapture, holding that the spiritually mature will be caught up at the time of the Lord's descent into the air, that is, before the Tribulation, but that the unspiritual believers will remain on the earth for that hour of trial.

THE NATURE OF THE TRIBULATION

Before proceeding with the discussion of the subject, let us briefly ask what we mean by the Tribulation and

6 WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

the Church. By the Tribulation we mean a definite period of time of unparalleled trouble and sorrow upon the earth. In Dan 12:1 it is spoken of as "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time"; in Matt. 24:21-29 it is described as a "great tribulation"; Luke 21:34-36 refers to it as "that day," described in the preceding part of the chapter; Rev. 3:10 speaks of it as "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth"; and in Rev. 7:14 we read of a great multitude who had come "out of great tribulation"; in the Old Testament it is called the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:4-7) and the time of God's "indignation" with the inhabitants of the earth (Isa. 24:17-21; 26:20, 21; 34:1-3; Zech. 14:1-3).

We are nowhere told in so many words just how long this period will last, but there are some indications that it will be a period of seven years. This we gather chiefly from the fact that a "week" in Dan. 9:24-27 is seven years. Since the sixty-ninth week ended at the crucifixion, and the seventieth week must be still future, we gather that it, too, covers seven years. This "week" is the period of the Tribulation. In harmony with this the latter half of the period is elsewhere referred to as "a time, times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14), as "forty-two months" (Rev. 11:2; 13:5), and as 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6; cf. Dan. 12:11, 12). We cannot go into a discussion of this question at this point; fortunately dissent from this conclusion does not affect the argument of this study.

During the Tribulation period we shall have a restored Roman empire, although it is not necessary to insist that the future Roman empire will have the exact

territorial extent as the old Roman empire. The "beast" will rule over this empire, assisted by the false prophet. At first the united "church," represented by the figure of the harlot (Rev. 17: 1-17), will rule the "beast." After a time, perhaps in the middle of the period, the ten confederate kings with the "beast" will depose the "woman" from her place of religious supremacy. After this the "beast" will require the whole world to worship him. The false prophet will see to it that this mandate is carried out by deception and boycotting (Rev. 13: 11-17; II Thess. 2: 9-12). A great persecution will break out against the saints who will have come to Christ during that period, and many will be killed. Particularly will the opposition be aimed at the Jews, many of whom will have returned to Palestine. The head of the Roman empire will make a covenant with them and will allow them to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem and restore their ancient worship. In the midst of that period he will break that covenant and cause the sacrifices to cease (Dan. 9:27). After that he will severely persecute them. Satan himself will be cast down to earth and will endeavor to exterminate the Jews (Rev. 12: 7-17). He will incite the nations of earth to come together for the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16: 12-16). When these nations seem about to succeed in crushing Israel, Christ will return and deliver His people (Zech. 14: 1-5). Thus after a period of unparalleled tribulation the King of kings will appear and take over the government of this world. In these few words we have set forth in outline the Scriptural teaching concerning the Tribulation.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

By the Church we do not mean Christendom, or the professing Church. Our Lord pictures for us this mixed condition of true and merely nominal Christians in the parables of the wheat and the tares, the good and the bad fish, the wise and the foolish virgins, etc. The Church is in the kingdom of heaven as there pictured, but is not identical with it. Nor is the Church the kingdom of God. True, both the Church and the kingdom of God are entered by the new birth, but the former is peculiar to this age while the latter seems to include believers of all ages (Luke 13:28, 29; Heb. 12:22-24). The Church is the entire body of God's people in this age. Christ spoke of the Church as still future. He said that He would build it, and that the gates of Hades (Greek) should "not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Paul thought of it as a universal entity when he said that he persecuted the Church (I Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6; cf. Acts 8:3), and when he enunciated his profound teaching concerning the Church. He said that Christ is the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18); that He loved it and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25); that He now purifies and will some day present it to Himself (Eph. 5:26, 27). That he conceived of the Church as composed of all the people of God is evident also from the figures of the Church which he employed. He represents it as the building of God (I Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:19-22; I Tim. 3:15) as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:24), and as the bride of our Lord (II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32). It is in this universal Church that God has set, "first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers," etc. (I Cor.

12:28). And it is the true Church of God that is making known to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). All of these statements indicate that the Scriptures conceive of the Church as the true people of God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews (12:23) this great company of believers is called the "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."

Our question, then, is this, Will the Church, the body of true believers in this age, be asked to go through the Tribulation? The question is not, Will the true Church be spared all *tribulations*? but, Will it be caught up to meet the Lord before the period of Tribulation briefly described above begins?

EARLY CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

In view of the various teachings current today, the seriousness of the time in which we are living, and, most of all, because of the bearing of this question on the belief in the imminence of our Lord's return, we should make a new investigation of the Scriptures with regard to this subject. This is all the more necessary because of the fact that in recent times some writers have come to place an undue value upon the testimony or lack of testimony to this doctrine in the Christian literature of the past. It is claimed, for instance, that there is no hint of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture in all the Christian literature from the earliest times to the end of the eighteenth century, and that the doctrine arose in the early part of the nineteenth century in connection with a movement to restore speaking in tongues, etc. It is charged that the new teaching was popularized by the Plymouth Brethren, and we are asked to regard it as heresy.

10 WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

We shall not attempt an investigation of this literature,¹ but shall summarize the evidence. In the testimony of the early Fathers there is an almost complete silence on the subject. They frequently speak of tribulations, but very seldom of a future period known as *the* Tribulation. This is, no doubt, due to the fact that during the second and third centuries the Church was passing through the great Roman persecutions, and it did not concern itself very much with the question of a future period of Tribulation. Perhaps it did not understand the exact nature of that period. One gets the impression that believers identified their persecutions with the predicted period of Tribulation.

This is clear, however, that they held not only the premillennial view of Christ's coming, but also regarded that coming as imminent. The Lord had taught them to expect His return at any moment, and so they looked for Him to come in their day. Not only so, but they also taught His personal return as being immediately. Only the Alexandrians opposed this truth; but these Fathers also rejected other fundamental doctrines. We may say, therefore, that the early Church lived in the constant expectation of their Lord, and hence was not interested in the possibility of a Tribulation period in the future. Once, indeed, in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, written between A.D. 100 and 120, there seems to be a hint at the possibility of exemption from that period.² To argue from the silence of these writers is, after all, a wrong procedure.

¹ See the writer's examination of the testimony of the early Fathers, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 92, April, 1935.

² Book I, Vision Fourth, ch. ii; cf. ch. iii.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Nor is it strange that the Post-Nicene Fathers and the leaders in the Middle Ages are silent with reference to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. With the rise of Constantine and the State Church, the Church turned to an allegorizing of the prophecies of the Scriptures concerning the Lord's return. The example of Origen had not a little to do with this trend. He was followed by Jerome and Augustine in the view that there will be no Millennium. In 373 the Council of Rome under Damasus formally denounced Chiliasm, and the Roman Catholic Church has since that time regarded the doctrine as a heresy. The truth, however, was not entirely extirpated during the Middle Ages, but was held only by the smaller bodies of believers who kept themselves aloof from the Catholic Church. It is, of course, clear that with the denial of a true doctrine of the Millennium there must go also the teaching concerning the Tribulation.

With the Reformation men again began to recognize the teaching concerning Christ's return. Haldeman quotes Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, and Knox as believing in the speedy return of our Lord.³ But in the last part of the seventeenth and the first part of the eighteenth century Daniel Whitby, an Arian, restored the methods of Origen, but called it a "new hypothesis." He taught that all the promises of the kingdom should be taken in a spiritual and allegorical sense.⁴ He is often called the father of modern postmillennialism. Brown and Snowden are recent exponents of postmillennialism. But there has been a return to the position of the early church. Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts, Bengel, Lange,

³ *History of the Doctrine of Our Lord's Return*, p. 23 f.

⁴ Haldeman, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

12 WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

Godet, Ellicott, Trench, Alford, the Bonar brothers, and most of the outstanding evangelists of the past and present generations have espoused the premillennial position.

From this it is clear, that the truth of the Lord's return was not a general hope of the Church from the time of Constantine on to the Reformation. It is no wonder that we do not find any teaching concerning the Rapture and the Tribulation in the literature of this period. The Reformers returned to the doctrine of the coming of Christ, but because of the need of emphasizing the truth of justification by faith, they did not give themselves to the development of the teaching concerning the Lord's return. Consequently they have not left us any considerable literature on the subject. It is not until we come to more recent times that we find the truth of the Lord's coming again in its proper place in the Church. It is, accordingly, only in our own times that the Scriptures have been studied with care regarding the subject of the Tribulation. True believers need scarcely to be reminded that Christian doctrine is established on the basis of Scripture, and not on the beliefs or non-beliefs of past generations. With due respect for all that the Church has inherited from the godly men of the past, we must yet remember that the Bible is our sole authority in matters of doctrine.

We believe that the Word of God teaches that because of God's grace the Church will be caught up to meet her Lord before the Tribulation. The evidence is cumulative. One point taken by itself may not furnish conclusive proof for our contention, but when all the facts are taken together there can be no doubt that this is

the teaching of the Scriptures. Let us turn to an examination of the evidence.

I. THE PROMISE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

This is found in Rev. 3:10: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." But here the question arises at once, How can a promise made to an individual church have any significance for any other church of Christendom? Even if we grant that this text teaches entire exemption from the hour of temptation that is to come upon the whole world, how can we show that this promise applies to the Church that will be on the earth at the time of the Lord's return?

It is safe to assume that in a book so full of symbols as the Book of Revelation, the churches in Rev. 2 and 3 have a manifold significance. In the first place, these seven letters were addressed and sent to seven local churches in the westernmost province of Asia Minor. We must not overlook the fact that they were immediately intended for seven local congregations that needed these words of warning, encouragement, and exhortation. In the second place, these churches prefigure seven types of churches that can be found in every age. There is always the Ephesus, the Smyrna, the Pergamos, etc., type of local church, even the Laodicean. In the third place, these churches symbolize seven types of Christians that can be found at all times and in all places. But it can scarcely be doubted that these churches have also a prophetic significance. They represent the professing Church from the Day of Pentecost to the time of the Lord's return in seven successive

14 WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

epochs. By the professing Church we here mean those who have true life as well as those who have nothing but a profession. Notice several things in proof of this assertion.

First, we have the symbolic number *seven*. There were more than seven churches in the province of Asia at this time (there was one also at Hierapolis, and another at Colosse); but only these seven are addressed. Did none of the others need a word of instruction, exhortation, or warning? It would seem that these seven were chosen because of their character and circumstances. Even the order in which they are introduced is significant. Granting that they come before us in the order in which the carrier traveled when he delivered the letters, we are still confronted with the question why he did not travel the other way around.

Then we note that there is some "mystery" connected with the candlesticks as well as the seven stars. The English translation somewhat obscures the meaning here. Charles well renders 1:20 as follows: "As for the mystery of the seven stars, which thou sawest in (lit. 'upon') my right hand, and of the seven golden candlesticks, the seven stars are," etc.⁵ Thus there is here a twofold mystery: that of the "seven stars" and that of the "seven golden candlesticks." This thought neither the Authorized Version nor the American Standard Version brings out. Now there is no mystery connected with the candlesticks in so far as they represent the seven local churches of Asia. Such symbolism is of too frequent occurrence in the Apocalypse to justify the name "mystery." There must be a mystical meaning intended. Seiss says, these churches "represent seven phases or periods of the

⁵ Com. on the Revelation, Vol. 1, p. 33 f.

Church's history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ, the characteristics of which are set forth partly in the names of the churches, but more fully in the epistles addressed to them."⁶

And, finally, the characteristics of these churches fit chronologically into their respective places in the history of the Church. The Church in Ephesus corresponds to the Apostolic Church. The Church in Smyrna finds its counterpart in the Martyr Church of the second and third centuries. The Church in Pergamos represents the State Church, beginning with Constantine and continuing to the end. The Church in Thyatira has the features of the Papal Church, beginning with Gregory the Great and continuing to the end. The Church in Sardis pictures the Reformation Church, beginning with the sixteenth century. The Church in Philadelphia sets forth the characteristics of the Missionary Church, beginning with the rise of modern missions under William Carey. And the Church in Laodicea portrays the Apostate Church of the last days. We cannot enter into an exposition of these letters, but to the one who believes in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures and studies the detailed descriptions, the correspondences between these churches and the successive periods of church history seem too marked to be merely accidental. He comes away with the conviction that the key fits the lock so perfectly as to warrant the assumption that it is the true key. Dr. Ironside proves this point by means of a beautiful parable about some people who were rummaging through an old castle. They came to a closed door which was securely locked. One key after another was tried, but none would unlock the door.

⁶ Lectures on the Apocalypse, Vol. I, p. 142.

Finally they used a peculiar old key, and at once the lock was open. Surely they were right in saying, "This key was meant for this lock."⁷

If we accept this view of the seven letters, then we have here some very important teaching as to the "time of the Rapture." It is clear then, that we are now in the Philadelphian period of the Church's history. The Laodicean Church is manifestly the apostate part of Christendom, and is taking on very definite form in our day. On the basis of these facts we may say that the Philadelphian Church is promised escape from the Tribulation, but the Laodicean Church will be rejected by Christ and obliged to pass into that terrible period.

But let us carefully examine the language of the promise made to this Church. Alford shows that this hour of trial refers to the future Tribulation period. In refuting certain other interpretations he says: "The expositors have in many cases gone away from this broad and obvious meaning here, and have sought to identify the *hora peiras mou* with various periods of trial and persecution of the *Church*: a line of interpretation carrying its own refutation with it in the very terms used in the text."⁸

Assuming, then, that the Philadelphian Church represents the Missionary Church and that the "hour of trial" refers to the future Tribulation, we need to examine the words: "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation." More especially do we want to know what is the meaning of the verb "will keep" (*tereso*) and of the preposition "from" (*ek*). Alford says on the preposition *ek*, that it means "out of the midst of: but whether

⁷ Lectures on the Revelation, p. 35 f.

⁸ Alford's Greek Testament, in loc.

by immunity from, or by being brought safe through, the preposition does not clearly define." He goes on to say that the distinction which Duesterdick, al., attempted to set up between *terein ek* and *terein apo*, cannot be safely maintained, for, as he well says, it is not easy to see that in John 17:15 ("but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one"), where we have the former, and in James 1:27 ("and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"), where we have the latter, "the former implies passing scatheless through the evil, while the latter imports perfect immunity from it." He adds: "This last we may grant: but is it not equally true in the other case?"⁹ Thus he points out that grammatically the two terms can have the same meaning, so that Rev. 3:10 may mean, not "passing unscathed through the evil," but "perfect immunity from it." Alford's own preference for the former of these alternatives has nothing to do with the grammar of the statement. Moffatt likewise grants that the grammar permits the interpretation of absolute immunity from the period.¹⁰ Other scholars say the same thing as to the preposition *ek* (*out of, from*). Buttmann-Thayer says that *ek* and *apo* "often serve to denote one and the same relation," referring to John 17:15; Acts 15:29; Rev. 3:10 as examples of this usage.¹¹ Abbott doubts "if in the LXX and John *ek* always implies previous existence in the evils from which one is delivered when used with *sozo* and *tereso*" (i.e., with the verbs *to save* and *to keep*).¹² Westcott says regarding *ek sozo* (to

⁹ Op. cit., in loc.

¹⁰ Expositor's Greek Testament, in loc.

¹¹ Grammar of the New Testament Greek, p. 326, f.

¹² Johannine Grammar, p. 251 f. I owe this note to A. T. Robertson.

18 WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

save from) that it “does not necessarily imply that that is actually realized out of which deliverance is granted (cf. II Cor. 1:10), though it does so commonly (John 12:27).”¹³ Similarly we read in I Thess. 1:10 that Jesus delivers us “from (*ek*) the wrath to come.” This can hardly mean protection *in* it; it must mean exemption *from* it. It would seem, then, to be perfectly clear that the preposition “from” may be taken to mean complete exemption from that which is predicted. It is clear that the context and other statements in Scriptures require that this be the interpretation. As for the context, note that the promise is not merely to be kept from the *temptation*, but from the *hour* of temptation, i.e., from the period of trial as such, not only from the trial during the period. And, again, why should the Apostle write *ek tes horas* (*from the hour*), as he did, when he might easily have written *en te hora* (*in the hour*), if that is what he meant to say? Surely, the Spirit of God guided him in the very language he employed.

We conclude, therefore, that we have in this text a promise that the true Church will be taken away before the hour of temptation begins, and not merely an assurance of protection *in* it. Strange to say, some interpreters who in one breath maintain that Rev. 3:10 teaches that the Church will pass unscathed through the Tribulation, in the next explain the persecutions and martyrdoms in the Revelation as being suffered by the Church! Consistency would demand that they seek some other solution of the problem.

II. THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL

In our study of the seventy weeks of Daniel (9:24-27) we should observe that the entire period has to

¹³ Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 128.

do with Daniel's people and Daniel's holy city, and that the Church is not at all in view in that prophecy. We cannot go fully into the matter here, but desire to point out the facts that have to do with our subject. A week denotes seven years, and after seven times sixty-nine years Messiah was to be "cut off." This indicates, however we date the beginning of these weeks, that the earthly life of Jesus was lived during the last part of these sixty-nine weeks, for they end, not at His birth, but at His death. Near the close of His earthly life Christ spoke of the future building of the Church (Matt. 16:18; cf. 18:17), which shows that it was not in existence at that time. This Church was formed fifty days after our Lord's resurrection, that is, on the Day of Pentecost, by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 5; 2:1-4; 11:15-17; I Cor. 12:13). Thus the Church began after the close of the sixty-ninth week and before the beginning of the seventieth week. Following the statement that after sixty-nine weeks Messiah would be cut off, Daniel declares that "the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined" (9:26). All this indicates that between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks there is a long interval and that the seventieth week is still future. If the Church did not exist during the weeks that are past, how can we suppose it to be on earth during the week that is yet to come? We must always remember that all these weeks are Jewish in nature, the week to come as well as the weeks that are already past.

Those futuristic interpreters of the Revelation who hold that the Church will pass through the Tribulation,

lose sight of the true nature of the Church. When we are told that the martyrs of Rev. 6: 9-11, the innumerable company of Rev. 7: 9, 10, those who "loved not their lives unto death" in Rev. 12:11, those who are declared blessed if they "die in the Lord," Rev. 14:13, and those who are warned in Rev. 16:15, are all the Church, it is evident that there is no clear distinction between the Church and God's people of previous and future ages. But unless we wish to go back to the allegorical interpretation of the promises made to Israel and to do away with the distinct place and mission of the Church, we cannot allow for such a confusion of things that differ. It reminds one of the allegorizing of post-millennial writers who see the Church in the Old Testament. To them everything is the Church: Mount Zion, Jerusalem, Israel, Jacob, Ephraim, etc., all are the Church.

Over against this interpretation, we maintain that the seventieth week of Daniel is still future; that it is the future period of Tribulation; that it is covered by Rev. 6-19; that the Church has nothing to do with any of these weeks; and that this position lays the foundation for a consistent interpretation of the Revelation.

We hold that the Church began on the Day of Pentecost, after the sixty-ninth week had run its course, and that it will continue until the seventieth week begins. That is, we believe that the Rapture will take place before the judgments of the Tribulation period begin.

III. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE TRIBULATION

Those who hold that the Church will pass through the Tribulation also fail to perceive the true *nature* and

purpose of the Tribulation. They argue that inasmuch as God permitted the Church to be persecuted during the second and third centuries by pagan Rome, and during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by papal Rome, that therefore we have no ground for supposing that she will escape the persecutions of the Tribulation. So realistically does one writer accept the fact that the Church will suffer persecution and martyrdom during that period, that he dwells on the method of execution that will be employed. He says: "It is significant that the only form of martyrdom mentioned in connection with the Tribulation is beheading, which is one of the quickest and least painful modes of execution, seeing that it results in instantaneous death; especially when inflicted by the guillotine, as most likely will be the case: following the example set during that miniature Tribulation, 'The Reign of Terror,' during the time of the French Commune."¹⁴ To this we need only reply, that whatever may be the fact as to the painlessness of death by beheading, such a view is a far cry from Paul's "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13). It should be said also that the French Reign of Terror, terrible as that was, is not an exact parallel to the Tribulation yet to come.

This declaration may startle some and they may say, Are not both periods characterized by lawlessness, ungodliness, and bloodshedding? To this we, of course, reply in the affirmative; but to think of the Tribulation as primarily a time of the outbreaking of man's great wickedness, is missing the point. We maintain that the Tribulation is primarily God's visitation of judgment

¹⁴ Scruby, *The Great Tribulation*, p. 154.

upon a Christ and God-rejecting world, both Gentile and Jewish.

Let us return to Rev. 3:10 once more. The writer describes the "hour of trial" from which Christ promises to keep the Church in Philadelphia as the hour "which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Now the word for dwell used here (*katoikeo*) is a strong word. It is used to describe the fulness of the Godhead that dwelt in Christ (Col. 2:9); it is used of Christ's taking up a permanent abode in the believer's heart (Eph. 3:17), and of demons returning to take absolute possession of a man (Matt. 12:45; Luke 11:26). It is to be distinguished from the word *oikeo*, which is the general term for "dwell," and *paroikeo*, which has the idea of transitoriness, "to sojourn." Thayer remarks, that the term *katoikeo* has the idea of permanence in it. Thus the judgment referred to in Rev. 3:10 is directed against the earth-dwellers of that day, against those who have settled down in the earth as their real home, who have identified themselves with the earth's commerce and religion. We have already seen that Alford criticizes those who identify this hour of trial "with various periods of trial and persecution of the Church."¹⁵ Then we have the judgments of the Seals, Trumpets, and Vials in the Revelation as further proof of the fact that the Tribulation will originate with God. Anyone reading chapters 6, 8, 9, 11: 15-19; 15: 5 - 16:21; 18 will observe that these are all judgments that proceed directly from Him. With this agree the many predictions of the Old Testament. See, e.g., Isa. 24, esp. vv. 16-21; Jer. 25: 15-38; Ezek. 38, 39; Hag. 2: 20-22.

¹⁵ See footnote 8.

More particularly the Scriptures teach that the Tribulation will be a visitation of God upon Christ-rejecting Israel. Both the leaders and the people cried before Pilate: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27: 25). This terrible clamor has issued in untold sorrow for Israel in this whole dispensation. Not only did it lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of that nation, but also to the many blood-baths that have come upon it in dispersion. Though all this is historical fact, the Word of God predicts that a yet greater sorrow awaits this people. The prophet says: "Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30: 6, 7).

The prophet Ezekiel refers to the same time when he says: "As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: and I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter

24 WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 20: 33-38).

Similarly Zechariah describes this judgment upon Israel prior to Christ's return to the earth when he says: "It shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God" (Zech. 13: 8, 9). From these and other Scriptures it is clear that though many Israelites will be killed during the period, yet a remnant will be brought safely through it,—all those who recognize Christ as their Messiah,—into the millennial kingdom.

We say, therefore, that while the persecutions of the past were the endeavors of wicked men to exterminate the Church, the Tribulation to come is a judgment of God upon wicked men. True, there will be persecutions of the godly then on earth, but that is an incident in the program rather than a fundamental characteristic of the period.

This fact is further confirmed by the teaching of Jesus. He said that the days of the Son of man would be like the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17: 26-32). We know that God delivered both Noah and Lot when He judged the ungodly. Noah, in his preservation in the Ark, is a type of the remnant of Israel that will accept Christ early in the Tribulation period and so be preserved through it (Jer. 30: 7; Rev. 7: 1-8); and Lot, in his removal to Zoar, a type of the Church. Let us

examine the events connected with Lot a little more closely.

In Gen. 18: 23-32 we are told that, after God had disclosed to Abraham that He would destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the patriarch argued thus with God: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We know that Abraham continued to reason with the Lord until the Lord promised that He would spare the cities if there were ten righteous in them. But the Lord did not find even ten righteous men in Sodom and Gomorrah, and so He could not spare the cities. But did that mean that Lot and his family had to perish with the ungodly or even to suffer affliction with them? Indeed not! It did not seem to occur to Abraham that there was another possibility, but there was. We are told that angels came and took Lot and his family and brought them out of the city, and that they even consented to spare Zoar for their sake (Gen. 19: 15-21). And then we are informed that the angel hastened Lot, saying that he could do nothing till Lot be come thither (v. 22). The story ends with the statement: "The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (vv. 23-25).

Peter has this very situation in mind when he speaks of God's condemning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with an overthrow and delivering righteous Lot (II Pet. 2:6-8). He adds: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (v. 9). From all this it would seem to be clear that the Tribulation is a direct visitation of judgment from God, and that before He will set out on such a program He will remove His children from the scene of the judgment.

IV. THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

We have already briefly set forth the view that Rev. 2 and 3 covers prophetically the whole period of church history.¹⁶ Futuristic interpreters are agreed that chapters 4-19 are almost exclusively predictions and representations that are yet future. The language seems too strong to warrant either the Preterist view, viz., that all from Rev. 4 on was fulfilled in the twofold victory of the Church: over the synagogue (chs. 5-11), and over pagan Rome (chs. 12-19); or the Historical view, viz., that these judgments were fulfilled in the invasion and overthrow of the Roman Empire, the victorious march of the Saracens, the Turks, the rise and dominance of the Papacy, the French Revolution, etc. The opening words of Rev. 4:1 and the closing words of that verse are exactly the same, *meta tauta*; but unfortunately even the American Standard Version translates the former by "after these things" and the latter by "hereafter." Thus the impression is given that the latter term refers to things in the present Church age, whereas the phrase denotes that which is to occur next

¹⁶ See under I.

in order. In this verse it refers to that which is to occur next after the course of the Church has been run, the course that has been set forth in chapters 2 and 3. All the chapters following them are, therefore, given to a discussion of the things that follow this present Church age.

Following the rejection of the apostate Laodicean Church, we come next to a vision of the preparations made in heaven for the pouring out of the Tribulation judgments (chs. 4, 5). The first thing that strikes us in 4: 1, 2 is that John was transported in the spirit to see what was taking place in the heavens. We need not insist that this is to be understood either in a literal or in a figurative way; suffice it to say that he is made a near spectator of all that follows. Some have seen in this statement a hint of the Rapture of the Church, and it is possible that that is the true significance of it; but we must not forget that John became merely a spectator and not an actor in the scenes that follow. Then we are told that he observed that "a throne was being set" (*ekeito* is an imperfect, a special throne was being set for the purpose of the judgments that follow). On the throne there is One Who is easily identified as the Father, for we note that He is distinguished from the Lamb in chapter 5: 6, 7. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones on which sat twenty-four elders, "clothed in white garments; and they had on their heads crowns of gold." The word "elders" (*presbuteroi*) occurs twelve times in the Revelation, and only in this section of the book: 4: 4, 10; 5: 5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7: 11, 13; 11: 16; 14: 3; 19: 4. Now who are these "elders"? The answer to this question throws definite light on our inquiry as to the time of the Rapture.

They are, of course, not the "four living creatures" mentioned twenty times in the Revelation (counting both singular and plural uses of the term), also only in chapters 4-19. The "living creatures" are different in nature and service from the elders, but are nearly always mentioned in the same context with them. Nor yet are they angels. Angels are mentioned sixty-seven times, counting figurative and literal uses,—fifty times in chapters 4-19; but they are distinguished from both the "elders" and the "living creatures" (5: 11; 7: 11; cf. 15: 5-7). Nor are they identical with the "great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," for they are distinguished from them also (7: 9-13). The latter are said to have "come out of the great tribulation" (7: 13, 14). Neither are they merely twenty-four individuals, for they speak on behalf of a vast multitude of redeemed ones out "of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation" (5: 9, 10).

But who are they and whence came they? Alford says that they are "representatives of the Church," which he explains to mean both Old and New Testament saints.¹⁷ This is true, except that we should not use the term "church" for the totality of God's people of Old and New Testament times. That there is a fusion of Old and New Testament saints in the Apocalypse is evident in the description of the New Jerusalem. On its gates we find the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and on its foundations the names of the twelve apostles (21: 12-14). To us it seems clear that the elders represent the two great companies of God's people, those who

¹⁷ Greek Testament, in loc.

lived before the death of Christ and those who have lived since that time.

This we gather in the first place from the song that they sing (5: 9-10). Even granting that we should omit the word "us" in this reference and supply some such word as "men," with the American Standard Version, we still believe that they sing of themselves and the companies they represent. Both Israel and the Church are a "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19: 6; I Pet. 2: 9, 10), and as symbolized by the twenty-four courses of priests in Old Testament times, they here represent the people before God. This is clear also from the fact that they are already crowned. Seiss says: "The coronation time is the resurrection time; and no one can be crowned until he is either resurrected if dead or translated if living."¹⁸ Ottman says similarly: "There ought to be very little question as to the identification of these crowned elders. They constitute the united royal priesthood predicted alike of Israel and the Church. They are seen here in one company redeemed and *glorified*. The prophet Daniel has a vision of the time when the Son of man comes to take His kingdom, and in that vision thrones are set, but they are without occupants. As a matter of fact, in Daniel's day, the thrones though established were vacant. Now we are come to the time of the accomplishment of Daniel's prophecy, and the thrones are filled."¹⁹ Mead gives a number of illustrations in which the term "elders" is used in a representative sense, for example, when Moses was asked to deliver a message to Israel and then proceeded to deliver it to

¹⁸ Lectures on the Apocalypse, Vol. i, p. 250.

¹⁹ Unfolding of the Ages, p. 109.

the "elders" (Ex. 19: 3-8). Cf. also Deut. 5: 23; II Chron. 5: 2-4; Josh. 23:2; 24: 1; I Kings 8: 1-3.²⁰

We conclude, then, that the scene in Rev. 4, 5 is the direct outcome of the Rapture. The Lord has descended from heaven, the dead in Christ of both Old Testament and New Testament times, have been raised, and the believers in Christ then living have been caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess. 4: 16, 17). The "elders" represent these two companies before the throne. From this it follows that the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation, since they are arrayed in white garments and crowned before the first seal is broken. During the entire period of these awful judgments they are safe with the Lord in the upper regions.

V. THE MISSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

This is in a peculiar sense the age of the Holy Spirit. Both John the Baptist and Jesus intimated that the baptism of the Spirit would introduce a new era, and the Book of Acts shows that on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Christ's resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples. Thus the advent of the Spirit is directly connected with the forming and administering of the Church. The Holy Spirit forms the Church by baptizing the believers into the body of Christ; He administers the Church by calling, enduing, and thrusting forth workers. But He also has a mission toward the world. Jesus said that He would "convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16: 7-11). He thus restrains sin and lawlessness and endeavors to lead men to Christ. He does this work

²⁰ The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, pp. 77-79.

chiefly through the Church. The believers of this age, as of every age, are the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matt. 5: 13-16); but they have their pungency and their illumination only from the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit's presence in the Church He restrains lawlessness and corruption in the world. This He will do so long as He is present on earth, that is, as long as the Church is here.

Paul seems to teach this in II Thess. 2: 1-8. He says that there must come a falling away first, and that the man of lawlessness must be revealed before the appearing of the day of the Lord. This is the Day of the Lord so graphically described by the prophets in the Old Testament, a day of judgment and of deliverance. It will be ushered in by the coming of Christ with His own, at the close of the Tribulation period. Look at some of the details of the passage.

The Apostle says that the mystery of iniquity was already at work in his day, but adds that there is something that "withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time" (v. 6). In the following verse he speaks of this hindrance as personal, "he who now letteth" (hindereth) (v. 7). It is not until this hindrance or hinderer is out of the way that the lawless one, the man of sin, will be revealed. The lawless one is easily identified with the Beast of Rev. 13: 1-10. But who is he that restraineth? Various writers hold that this refers to law and order, especially as these were embodied in the Roman empire.

But while human governments may be used by the Spirit of God to restrain evil, we believe that they do so primarily because of the teaching and preaching ministry of the Church. Back of all human government is

God Who instituted it (Gen. 9; 5, 6; Rom. 13: 1-7) and controls it (Ps. 75: 5-7). So it is God by His Spirit that restrains the development of lawlessness. It cannot be human government as such, for even the coming emperor of the restored Roman empire will continue to govern during the Tribulation, and that in a most despotic manner. The lawlessness which the Holy Spirit restrains is disregard for the law of God more than for the law of man, though the latter also is included.

Mrs. George C. Needham holds that he that "withholdeth" is Satan himself. She says: "Why should everyone conclude that this hinderer must be some *good* thing? May not this restraining power be Satan himself? Has he not a plan for the manifestation of the Son of Perdition, as truly as God had a time appointed for the incarnation of His divine Son?"²¹ She insists that we should translate vv. 7, 8 thus: "For the mystery of wickedness already is working—only there is at present one that restraineth—until it become developed out of the midst. And then shall be revealed the Wicked One,"²² etc. By "developing out of the midst," she understands that "the mystery which had so long fermented in secret, will center and develop itself in one notorious and openly apostate leader, who shall represent the infidelity and lawlessness of the world, both Jewish and Gentile."²³ But this rendering of the Greek is, to say the least, questionable, and the interpretation vague. What is it to develop "out of the midst"? Would it not make better sense if it were said, "in the midst"? Out of the midst of what? Besides, this view

²¹ *The Antichrist*, p. 91

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 90.

²³ *Ibid.*

concedes to Satan more power than seems to be warranted by the whole teaching of Scripture. His plans are, after all, subordinate to the rule of God.

The writer holds that neither of the above views is satisfactory. He believes instead that that which "withholdeth" (neuter, v. 6) and "he who letteth" (hindereth) (masculine, v. 7), is none other than the Holy Spirit. He, no doubt, employs human government and human laws, as also providential interventions, in the accomplishment of His purposes, as we have already said above, but more especially the testimony and influence of the Church. The days of Noah are pictures of the end-time in more than one way (Luke 17: 26, 27). It is striking to note in this connection that in Gen. 6:3 we have a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in Noah's time. And what was He doing? He was striving with men, restraining them from wickedness and seeking to induce them to repent. We read: "And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh." If He did this in the Antediluvian age, how much more will He do this in the age of the Spirit? He will continue to do this so long as the Church, His chief instrument, is in the world. When the Church is caught up, the Holy Spirit will be taken from the world in the peculiar sense in which He is present on earth today. This does not mean that He will no longer be here in any sense; but it does mean that He will no longer be here in the same degree of manifestation. He will be here at that time in some such way as He was present in the world before the Day of Pentecost.

If, then, the lawless one, the Son of Perdition, cannot be revealed until the Holy Spirit be taken out of the

way at the Rapture of the Church, and the rule of that wicked one be of some duration, the Rapture of the Church must take place before the Tribulation. This is further shown by the fact that this emissary of Satan will be destroyed by the "breath of His mouth," and brought to nought by "the brightness of His coming" (II Thess. 2:8); that is, at the coming of Christ *with* His saints, after the Tribulation. These things combine to prove that the Church will be caught up before the Tribulation begins.

VI. THE NECESSITY FOR AN INTERVAL

Those Futurists who hold a different view from that set forth in this study, teach that believers will be caught up to meet Christ as He descends from heaven, but that they will immediately return. In other words, they deny that there will be an interval of time between the two events. But in none of the references where the Greek word *apantesis*, meaning "meeting," occurs is it clear that the return is immediate. In Matt. 25:6 this is not the meaning required by the word; and in Acts 28:15, Paul, undoubtedly, first had a time of fellowship with the brethren that came to meet him, before they together started for Rome. The Greek word does not *forbid* such an interpretation, even if these two references did imply immediate return, for the substantive simply means *meeting*, and the verb, *to go to meet, to meet*.²⁴ The Textus Receptus uses the verb in Luke 14:31, "in a military sense of hostile meeting," as is also the case in the LXX of I Sam. 22:17; II Sam. 1:15; I Macc. 11:15, 68, and often in Greek writers.²⁵

²⁴ Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, s. v.

²⁵ Thayer, *op. cit.*

In these cases the idea of return is altogether absent. It is clear, however, that our meeting with Christ in the air will be followed by a return to earth with Him. It cannot be maintained that the word used to express the idea of meeting the Lord implies *immediate* return.

From a comparison of various Scriptures it is clear that there will be an interval between the Rapture and the Revelation. Two things at least must take place between these two events, and both will consume time. These are the judgment seat of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Scriptures teach explicitly, that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). In Rom. 14:10 the correct text reads, "the judgment seat of God," perhaps to indicate that Christ is God, for the Father "hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). The believer will never come into judgment with regard to his sins (John 5:24), but he will be obliged to appear before Christ with a view to determining his eligibility for a reward. It will be an examination of his work, to determine what he has done for Christ since he became a Christian. If he has built on the foundation, namely, upon Christ, either gold, silver, or precious stones, he will receive a reward; but if he has built of wood, hay, or stubble, his work will be burned up, although he himself will be saved, "yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:11-15).

Some who recognize the fact of such a judgment deny that it will take place between the two events. But they fail to locate the event anywhere. Apparently there is no real place for it in such a scheme of interpre-

tation. There is danger of doing away entirely with the judgment of the believer's works, or of reverting to the post-millennial view of a general judgment. But the parable of the Nobleman teaches that the judgment of the servants precedes the judgment of the citizens. When the Nobleman returned he called his servants and made a reckoning with them. They were assigned their proper rewards, before the Nobleman established his kingdom (Luke 19: 15-19). This order seems to grow out of the needs of the situation. The rewards are here spoken of as places of authority on thrones; elsewhere other rewards are specified. These rewards must be bestowed before believers can sit with Christ upon thrones in the coming kingdom.

If the teaching of the Scriptures concerning the time and place of the judgment of the believer's works is clear, the revelation concerning the time and place of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is even clearer. The fullest description of this latter event is found in Rev. 19: 1-10. There are other passages that indicate that the Church is the Bride, and that some day Christ will present this Bride to Himself as a "glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (II Cor. 11: 2; Eph. 5: 22-32); but there is none fuller than the one brought before us in Rev. 19. In v. 4 we see both the Old and New Testament saints under the term "the twenty-four elders"; in v. 6 we see the same company represented as a "great multitude"; and in vv. 7-9 the picture seems to divide into two parts, vv. 7 and 8 referring to the Church, the Lamb's wife, and v. 9, to the Old Testament saints, the guests.

Whether or not the Tribulation saints are also included among the guests need not be discussed here.

The writer thinks that they are probably included among them. But this one thing is clear, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb takes place between the Rapture and the Revelation. The Bride is already present, for it was granted to her "that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (better, *righteous acts*) of saints" (v. 8). That is, the Rapture has already taken place. And the Revelation has not yet occurred. Incidentally, note that the "righteous acts," with which the Bride clothes herself, represent the things done in the body; that is, the reward for service here below, as we have shown in the preceding paragraph. That the whole scene is laid in heaven is clear from a comparison of vv. 1 and 11. Immediately after the Marriage Supper heaven is opened, and Christ with His "armies," the two companies of saints mentioned in the first part of the chapter, return to the earth (vv. 11-16). Christ is now represented as a Captain and His people as armies, for they proceed to the battle of Armageddon on earth (vv. 17-21). Following this battle, Satan is bound for a thousand years, the saints take their thrones, and reign with Christ a thousand years (20: 1-6). Thus the Marriage Supper also takes place between the Rapture and the Revelation.

Nothing needs to be said in proof of the assertion that both the judgment of believers and the Marriage Supper will consume time. In connection with the latter we read that the Hallelujah chorus will be sung, and we expect to join in it. Some one once said when the writer emphasized this fact, that we will not omit the third stanza of this chorus, as churches and Sunday-schools often do in our modern singing, but that we

will sing all of it. On the theory that the Rapture is immediately followed by the Revelation, no time is left for these glorious festivities. Surely, this is a strong reason for believing that the Rapture will take place before the Revelation, i.e., before the Tribulation.

VII. THE EXHORTATIONS TO CONSTANT EXPECTATION OF CHRIST

This is one of the strongest proofs that the Rapture will take place before the Tribulation, and the opponents of this truth labor hard to weaken its force. We shall deal briefly with the chief difficulties, but note first the teaching of Scripture on the subject of watchfulness and waiting. Again and again we are admonished to *watch* in the light of the Lord's speedy return. In Matt. 24: 42, 43, we read: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." Matt. 25:13 says: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." In Mark 13: 35-37 we have these words: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

The force of these admonitions must not be toned down, or even destroyed, by referring them all to Israel in the Tribulation time. They belong to the Church as well as to Israel. This is evident from the fact that they are repeated in the Epistles. Thus Paul says:

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (I Thess. 5:6). To the backslidden believers in the church at Sardis the Holy Spirit said: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (Rev. 3:3). Paul wants us to be "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and (or *even*) our Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13). He does not ask us to look for the Tribulation, or for the Antichrist, or for persecutions and martyrdom, or for death, but for the return of Christ. If any of these events must precede the Rapture, then how can we help looking for them rather than the Lord's coming?

Such a view of the coming of the Lord can at best only induce a very general interest in the "blessed hope." In Heb. 9:28 we read: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." But how can we wait for One Who cannot come until several other momentous things have taken place? Those futuristic interpreters of the Revelation who hold that the Church must pass through the Tribulation, must expect that all that is predicted in Rev. 4-19 will be fulfilled before the Lord can return. But to hold such a view makes it impossible for one to "look" for the return of Christ as imminent. If the Scriptures really mean for us to look for Christ's return as an immediate possibility, the Rapture must take place before the Tribulation.

We are not unaware of the fact that there are some things in Scripture that seem to contradict this view. But

the difficulties are not insuperable. On a close examination of the exact statements of the Word, they vanish into thin air. Several of the supposed difficulties present no problem at all; for example, the assertion sometimes made, that the very fact that Christ sent the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost implies a long time of His operation on earth. But our Lord spent only a little more than three years in active ministry when He was here; and there is no inherent reason for supposing that the Holy Spirit's ministry must continue for millenniums or even centuries. More superficial is the argument that because Paul planned to visit Rome and Spain, he could not have looked for the Lord to return at any time (Rom. 15: 22-25, 30, 31). The Apostle himself tells us that his plan to make this journey was contingent upon the Lord's will (Rom. 1: 9, 10). The same can, no doubt, be said about all Paul's plans (I Cor. 4: 19; 16: 5-7), as also about the plans of all the writers of the New Testament (Jas. 4: 13-16). Nor does Paul's statement that he looked forward to execution present any real difficulty (II Tim. 4: 6-8). Those who think there is a difficulty here mistake the meaning of the term "imminence" as applied to the Lord's return. This term does not mean of a certainty that He will come at once, but merely constant expectation of Him, on the ground that there is no revealed event that must precede His return. Paul speaks of being alive and remaining unto the coming of the Lord (I Thess. 4: 17), and yet he looked forward to what was likely to happen, if the Lord should not come during his lifetime.

A greater difficulty seems to be presented by Jesus' statement to Peter, that when he would be old, he would stretch forth his hands and another would gird him and

carry him whither he would not (John 21 : 18, 19). Surely, it is said, Peter could not have looked for the Lord to return at any time. To this we reply, that it is not certain that Peter understood this saying. It was many years after Peter's execution when John made this statement and applied it to Peter's method of exit from this life. However it may be as to Peter's understanding of the Master's word to him, we find that he preached the return of Christ as an imminent possibility right after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 3: 19-21). It is Peter also that answers the scoffers who question the fact of the Lord's speedy return (II Pet. 3: 3, 4, 9-15).

The parables of Matt. 13 present no real difficulty. They do not necessarily imply a long period for their fulfillment. Though we now can see that a long period of time is involved in that which is said in them, it is doubtful whether Matthew and the other disciples who heard the parables saw that such a period was implied. We believe that there is a chronological sequence in the parables, but we also definitely hold that they set forth a simultaneous development. We always have all varieties of these pictures of the kingdom of heaven. The disciples may not have apprehended the chronological sequence of the parables. Indeed, it seems clear that whatever view they had of them, this did not interfere with their constant expectation of the Lord's return.

As it was with regard to the development of the kingdom of heaven, so it was with the development of evil. The predictions that in the last days "perilous times" should come (II Tim. 3:1 ff.); that in the latter times "some shall depart from the faith" (I Tim. 4:1 ff.); and that "false teachers" will be found among the true,

who will bring in damnable heresies (II Pet. 3:1 ff.), do not imply that a long time is necessary before these things can be fulfilled. One needs only to read Paul's dark picture of the heathen world in Rom. 1:21-32 and to study the history of the period, to realize that Paul saw these things in some degree in his own times. Peter and Jude certainly present a dark picture of apostasy and worldliness in the Church in their day (II Pet. 2 and Jude 1). Paul even foresees apostasy among the Ephesian church members (Acts 20:29, 30). We believe, therefore, that the writers of the New Testament did not think of these predictions as referring to the remote future, but spoke of them as already being fulfilled, at least in part, in their own day. They intended their statements to be a warning to the very people to whom they wrote, and not simply to have meaning for us who live in the twentieth century.

As for the supposed implications in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20) that the Lord could not be expected for a long time by those who received the commission, we reply that that, too, is to misunderstand the true meaning of the imminence of the Lord's return. To begin with, the Lord's statement is not that the disciples or their successors are to *convert* the world. Some postmillennialists have tried to read that into this Scripture on the basis of the Greek text, which says: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations." But that the apostles did not so understand the Lord is very evident. Peter declared at the Jerusalem Council that God is during this age visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (Acts 15:14); and Paul speaks of the "fulness of the Gentiles" as a distinct number of Gentiles that are going to be saved in this

age (Rom. 11:25). What the Lord asked the disciples to do was to witness to all nations (Acts 1:8), and to make disciples of such as believed. That is, the Great Commission points out the destination of the Gospel, but makes no prediction as to the success of the Gospel. We might add that near the end of Paul's life he could say that the Gospel, which the Colossians had heard, "was preached in all creation (Greek) under heaven" (Col. 1:23; cf. v. 6). Always remember that Paul was the most active Apostle, and yet he spoke of surviving until the Lord's return (I Cor. 15:10; I Thess. 4:17).

Greater difficulties are presented by those Scriptures which indicate that there will be an interval between Christ's going away and His return; but they are not insuperable. The parable of the Nobleman requires the servants to "carry on business" (*pragmateuo*) until He returns (Luke 19:13), and the apostles sought to comply with this request. But this parable was spoken because "he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (19:11). Does this not indicate there would be an interval between the Nobleman's departure and return? To this we reply in the affirmative, although we believe that the disciples expected Him to return within their lifetime. We have already cited Peter in Acts 3: 19-21 as proof that they had such an expectation; and Paul surely held the same view. A similar explanation may be given of the statement in the parable of the Talents (Matt. 25: 14-30), that "after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" (v. 19). This, too, does not imply more than the lifetime of the apostles, although we now know that the time is much longer.

44 WILL THE CHURCH PASS THROUGH THE TRIBULATION?

The reason for these intimations that there would be an interval between the Lord's departure and return, is not far to seek. So far from not expecting Christ to come in their own day, the apostles and early Christians were in constant danger of becoming impatient in their waiting for His return. Thus James says to the oppressed laboring men of his day: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (Jas. 5: 7, 8). The Thessalonian Epistles indicate that some had stopped working, on the ground that Christ might come at any moment. Paul had to tell them that although He might come during their lifetime, they must not use this hope as an excuse for their idleness (I Thess. 4: 11 f.; II Thess. 3: 10-12). The same situation obtained when Christ came back the last time from Galilee. Many who had no spiritual apprehension as to the conditions on which the early kingdom might be set up, "supposed that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11). Christ had to overcome this attitude by indicating that the Nobleman must first depart and receive the kingdom, before He can return to set it up. Some hints had to be given to extend the patience of the people and the disciples. But as we have already said, there is no need to think that the disciples understood the Lord to speak of any long interval.

If the early disciples needed to have hints that the delay might be of some duration, we in our day need to be incited to look for the Lord's return at any time.

Surely, for us there are no "signs" that must be fulfilled before He can come. Such signs as Scripture lists all have to do with the Revelation, and not with the Rapture. This is implied in the repeated statement that Christ may come at any time, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or in the morning. It is implied also in the frequent admonitions to watch and wait at all times for His coming. From all this we conclude that the next thing on the prophetic program, so far as we have any word of prophecy on the subject, is the coming of Christ for His own.

But what about the teaching that the Church will be caught up in the middle of the Tribulation period? Some find support for this view in I Cor. 15: 51, 52. There Paul says: "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Historical interpreters connect this "last trump" with the seventh trumpet of Rev. 11:15. Accordingly they hold that the Church will pass at least through that part of the Tribulation which is covered by the Seals and the Trumpets. Olshausen and some of the older expositors held this view, and it is again being brought forward in our day by some teachers of prophecy.

But with Ellicott we say: "There are no sufficient grounds for supposing that there is here any reference to the seventh Apocalyptic trumpet (Rev. 11:15). . . . This *salpigx* (trumpet) the Apostle here terms *eschate* (last), not with reference to any preceding series . . . but as connected with the close of this *aiou* (age) and

the last scene of this world's history."²⁶ With this we agree, except that when Christ comes only the history of this age will come to a close. Ellicott was a pre-millennialist, and this is, no doubt, what he means by the statement. Meyer takes the same view, on the ground that in I Thess. 4:16, "only one trumpet is mentioned, and that one taken for granted as well known."²⁷ The same conclusion may be drawn from the fact that Paul follows the reference to the "last trump" with the impersonal statement, "for the trumpet shall sound" (see the Greek). If he had thought of this trumpet as one of seven, he would, undoubtedly, have said something like the following: "For when the trumpets will be sounded and the time comes for the last one to sound, the dead in Christ shall be raised." At any rate, there is no ground for identifying the "trump" in I Cor. 15:52 with the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11:15. Those in the Revelation introduce fearful judgments upon the world and mankind; this one calls the dead in Christ out of their graves and summons both the ones raised and the believers still living into the Lord's presence.

WILL ALL THE SAVED BE TAKEN AT THE RAPTURE ?

If, then, the Church is to be caught up *before* the Tribulation, not in the midst of it nor after it, what about the view that only the spiritually mature will be taken at the Rapture? May it not be, after all, that only such as are filled with the Spirit will be accounted worthy to escape from the awful judgments that are to come upon the earth? Does not Luke 21: 34-36 seem to teach this very thing?

²⁶ Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, in loc.

²⁷ Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, Vol. 2, p. 103.

We have no desire to put a pillow under the head of any drowsy or worldly-minded Christian, and it is always wise to be safe. The passage in Luke is surely an admonition to watchfulness and prayerfulness in view of the approaching period of judgment; but the reference to the escape may be primarily applicable to the Jews and to their escape from Palestine when these things begin to come to pass. However that may be, we believe that this passage must be interpreted in the light of the many other facts that bear on the question. It seems to us that in a fuller survey of the teaching of God's Word, we must come to the conclusion that all the regenerated will be caught up at the Rapture.

But before we seek to establish this point, let us note that the Scriptures support the profound conviction that there are many who profess to be Christians who have never been saved. Judas was one like that, for Jesus said in the night when He ate the last Passover with His disciples: "He that is bathed (Greek, *louo*) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all" (John 13: 10, 11). The context shows that Jesus referred to Judas when He said that. And yet his hypocrisy was so subtle that even the apostles did not detect it. In the same chapter Jesus declared that one of them would betray Him; but no one suspected Judas as the one to whom He referred. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus speaks of some seed falling upon the rocky ground and of other as falling among the thorns. Both types of ground showed growth and development, but it is clear that both represent unsaved people. There was the appearance of true life in both cases, but only the good ground represented the truly saved man. In the parable of the Tares Jesus

forbade the servants to go and pluck up the tares, not only lest they pluck up some of the wheat with the tares, but also because the darnel was so much like the wheat that even expert farmers could not always distinguish between it and the wheat. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, that in the last day many will say to Him: "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Whether this be true or not, Jesus will say to them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7: 22, 23). Paul warns us that "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6: 9, 10). He rejoices in the fact that, though some of the Corinthians had been guilty of these sins, they had now been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. From this it appears that much of what is called backsliding today is in reality the manifestation of an unsaved heart. Surely, no one that lives in these sins will be taken at the Rapture.

Having thus shown what classes will be left behind at the time of Christ's coming, and having emphasized the fact that often the differences between real salvation and mere profession cannot be detected by human observation, we yet believe that the Scriptures teach that all of God's people will be taken at the Rapture. The nature of the Church would seem to require that this be done. We have seen that the Church is a Temple (I Cor. 3: 16, 17; II Cor. 6: 16; Eph. 2: 20, 21). Will

any part of the building in which the Spirit dwells be left behind? We have also seen that the Church is the Bride of Christ (II Cor. 11: 2; Eph. 5: 24, 32; Rev. 19: 6-9). Will any part of His Bride be left behind? We have further seen that the Church is Christ's Body (I Cor. 12: 12-27; Eph. 1: 22, 23; 4: 12; 5: 29, 30; Col. 1: 18, 24). Will He leave any part of His Body behind? It is no more improbable that all believers who live and remain until the Lord's coming will be taken, than that all the dead in Christ will be raised at that time. Surely, many of those who have gone to be with the Lord were just barely saved and had not attained to spiritual maturity. Will they not be raised along with those of greater spiritual attainment?

It is always difficult to make one's self clear on a point like this. Let it not be assumed that all who will be caught up will enter equally into the joys and rewards of the Lord. We have already said this, but need to repeat it here. There will be those who before the judgment seat of Christ will be stripped of all their claim to rewards. They will be saved, "yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:15). There will be tears to wipe away when Jesus comes, and perhaps they will be tears over wasted years when here on earth. Only those who suffer with Him will reign with Him (II Tim. 2:12). The Scriptures seem to indicate that the differences in the reward when Christ returns will be eternal, that is, that a believer will not be able to change his rank in heaven, once he has been assigned his rightful place. Is not this a strong incentive to consecrate our all to Christ now in order that we may have an abundant entrance when He comes (II Pet. 1:11)? Surely the believer who has built of wood, hay, and stubble will

not be left behind when the Lord returns, but he will have no reward throughout all eternity.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As was said at the beginning of this study, the evidence is cumulative. Let us gather together the several arguments in a final summary. There is first the promise made to the Church in Philadelphia of exemption from "the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." It has been shown that the reference is to the future period of Tribulation, that the Philadelphia Church is a symbol of the Church of the last days, and that the Greek text warrants the interpretation that the Church will be *kept from* that hour, rather than *preserved in it*.

There is secondly the nature of the Seventieth Week of Daniel. We have seen that all the seventy weeks have to do with Daniel's people and Daniel's holy city, i.e., with Israel and Jerusalem; that the sixty-ninth week ended at the Cross of Christ and not at the birth of our Lord; and that the New Testament Church was not in the sixty-nine weeks. If, then, the Seventieth Week is the future Tribulation period, and if the Church was not in the sixty-nine weeks, we may draw the conclusion that it will not be in the seventieth week either. That is, we may infer that it will be taken up to be with the Lord before that week begins.

Thirdly, we have shown that the purpose and nature of the Tribulation makes the Pre-Tribulation Rapture necessary. This hour that is to come upon the whole world is not primarily Satan's attempt to thwart the work of God, but God's visitation of wrath upon a God and Christ-rejecting world. To all futuristic interpreters

of the Book of Revelation this ought to be a logical conclusion. The seals, the trumpets, and the wrath-vials all originate in heaven, and they are the outpouring of God's wrath upon a wicked world. Satan and the antichrist will bring to a head opposition to God and to His Christ, and there will be fearful persecutions and many martyrdoms, but these are not the primary characteristics of the Tribulation. The primary characteristics are found in the repeated predictions of the coming of the day of God's wrath (Joel 1: 15; 2: 1, 2, 11; Zeph. 1: 14; Rev. 6: 15-17), and of deliverance for His people Israel (Isa. 63: 4-6; Jer. 30: 7-8). And we have also seen that when God gets ready to punish the world, He takes His people away before His judgments begin to break forth. The case of Lot is a notable illustration of this principle.

In the fourth place, we have seen that the twenty-four elders in the Book of Revelation are the Old Testament and New Testament people of God. The Church is included among them. Since these elders are before the throne, seated, clothed in fine linen, and crowned before the first seal is broken, we may conclude that the Church will be caught up to Christ before the first Tribulation judgment will be poured forth.

We have seen further that the Hinderer is the Holy Spirit, and that the mystery of lawlessness, the man of sin, will not be fully revealed until the Hinderer is taken out of the way. Since the Holy Spirit indwells the Church and opposes the work of Satan chiefly through the Church, the restraining work of the Spirit will continue until the Church is taken away. Not that the Spirit will not be present on earth during the Tribulation period, but that He will not be present in the

same way in which He is present today. Thus the Church will be taken before this man of lawlessness will be revealed, that is, before the Tribulation.

We have shown in the sixth place that there is need for an interval between the Rapture of the Church and the Revelation of Christ to man on earth. Two things at least must take place between these two events: the believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of the deeds done in the body, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb must take place. Both events occur in the heavens, and they cannot take place until the Church has been taken up to meet the Lord. It seems evident that the Tribulation will run its course on earth between these two events. Therefore the Church will be caught up before the Tribulation.

And finally, we have emphasized the fact that the believer is to watch and wait for the Lord's return at any moment. The objections to taking these exhortations literally have been stated and dealt with. The Church is not to look for the antichrist, nor for the Tribulation, nor for any other signs of the end, but for the return of Christ in person. The early Church lived in the constant expectation of her Lord, and it is evident that that is the attitude the Scriptures desire us all to maintain. Since the Scriptures hold out the prospect of the Lord's return as the next event in the divine program, and since we are admonished to be constantly looking for Him, we conclude that He will return before the Tribulation.

From all this we conclude that the doctrine of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture is not the invention of men, whether

early or late in the history of the Church, but the clear teaching of the sure word of prophecy.

We may then comfort one another with the thought that the Church will not pass through the Tribulation. The "blessed hope" is not some distant event that has little practical value for the believer, but an imminent prospect. Our Lord may come at any time and receive us to Himself. Therefore let us look for Him at all times, purify ourselves as He is pure, and labor for the salvation of others until He shall actually appear.